



First Friday News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the *First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.*

Scholarships



Edition

July 2022

Volume 27

Issue 7

No July Meeting

FFBC Party

**July
16**

Party Location

**John Schmacker Home
3724 Hunter Ave
Des Moines**



August Speaker

**Jerry
Hatfield**



FFBC Website

ffbc Iowa.org



Life, Liberty, and a Little “Common Sense”

by Byron Huff, Board President

As we approach our nation's upcoming holiday on July 4, we should all recall the history behind it and what it means for our democracy.

The Revolutionary War broke out in April 1775, but was not widely popular among colonists until the pamphlet “Common Sense” was published by Thomas Paine in 1776. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence.

The Fourth of July, also known as Independence Day, has been a federal holiday since 1870; the provision was expanded in 1941 to include a paid holiday for all federal employees.

Most people equate the holiday with the “Star-Spangled Banner,” but the song did not become the national anthem until 1931 after becoming one of the nation's most popular patriotic songs over the past 100 years. The song was famously written by Francis Scott Key as he watched U.S. soldiers under bombardment from British naval forces during the war of 1812.

The tradition of fireworks for the 4th of July began in Philadelphia on July 4, 1777, which included a ship's cannon firing a 13-gun salute in honor of the 13 colonies. Fireworks, along with family get-togethers and barbecues, have become an annual tradition commemorating the holiday.



The Constitution of the United States was formed in 1789 along with the first 10 Amendments known as the Bill of Rights, which offer specific protections of individual liberty and justice as well as place restrictions on the powers of government. The framers wisely separated and balanced governmental powers to safeguard the democracy and protect liberty and equality for all.

[continued on page 2]

There continue to be challenges to the protections provided by the Constitution particularly related to LGBTQ+ rights. While many of us see it as a no-brainer that the protections should include sexual orientation, some "originalist" thinkers believe that statements in the Constitution must be interpreted based on the original understanding "at the time it was adopted." This stands in contrast to the "living" Constitution which asserts that the Constitution should be interpreted based on the context of current times.

Originalism's origin stems from the conservative political resistance to desegregation of public schools but has extended to argue against civil rights, and in our case, gay rights. Justice Scalia is an Originalist as are other recently appointed conservative justices. Now that the court has a conservative majority, we will inevitably see cases challenging many rights most thought were cemented in judicial law. The looming abortion opinion will likely unravel decades of judicial precedence. Just as likely, we will see cases challenging and ultimately chipping away at rights that have given LGBTQ+ individuals equal protections.

What we will see happen has taken years of methodical work by conservatives to pack the judicial system with conservative judges. The damage they will do to our democracy will take years at best to erase, assuming the tide turns toward a more liberal court system. The bottom line is that elections matter! Vote and push anyone you know to vote.

"If anyone is brave and true to themselves, it's my gay fans. The amount of confidence and fearlessness it takes to do what maybe is not what your parents expect you to do or what society may think is different - to be brave and be different and to be yourself - is just so beautiful."



(Beyoncé)

Briefs & Shorts



Thanks to **Byron Huff** for introducing **Mark Turnage**, our June speaker. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website and to **Nicholas Williams** for managing all of our Microsoft IT infrastructure. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor. *Thank you to all our contributors to the newsletter!*

The **deadline** for the **August newsletter** will be **July 25**. If you have something on your mind to share, type it up and email it to Wade (wadecpetersen@gmail.com) by the copy deadline.

A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the **Donor Direct** program of **United Way**. The contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.



Thanks also to all those **Amazon shoppers** who designate FFBC as the beneficiary when shopping **smile.amazon.com**. Your shopping with  smile.amazon.com means that a small contribution to FFBC will be made with every purchase. Proverbial, found money.

Our fundraising efforts are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have raised over **\$475,000** for scholarships that are awarded to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a tax-deductible **contribution online** or by sending a check.

Please consider a **tax-exempt testamentary gift**. Our first legacy gift to the FFBC scholarship program came from **Cliff Paulsen** to the tune of over **\$67,000**! Contact **Byron Huff** for details or with questions.





Future Speakers

August 5: Jerry Hatfield

Climate Change

September 2: Cindy Axne

U.S. House Representative

October 7: Dana Cardin

Retired KCCI Reporter and Asst. News Director

December 2:

Rev. Rushing Kimball

Plymouth UCC



FFBC Annual Summer **PARTY** & Donor Appreciation Event



The annual **First Friday Breakfast Club party** is Saturday, July 16, 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. at the home of John Schmacker (3724 Hunter Ave., Des Moines; north of University on 39th street, east on Hunter to the last house on the right).

This is a **free** event!

Serving beer, wine, and light appetizers/food.

Gun Violence Can Be Significantly Reduced in Frequency and Magnitude

by Jonathan Wilson

We have been witnesses to yet another senseless AR-15 slaughter of nineteen innocent, defenseless school children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, a place many of us had never heard of before. Being previously unheard of, Uvalde has, overnight, become a metaphor for every unnamed community anywhere in the country. Thoughts and prayers have been sent, again. The expression has become a meaningless cliché...prayers that I can join in seeking God's comfort and resilient strength for loved ones of those who died. Thoughts, on the other hand, need to be focused on what can actually be done about this recurring nightmare. God has no hands but our hands.

Let's start with the inescapable fact that there isn't one single thing that can be done to stop all gun violence in this country. The argument is made (by those opposed to regulation of guns) that, absent such a "silver bullet," there's no need to discuss the subject. An equally flawed permutation of that argument is that because whatever is proposed would not have avoided the most recent example of gun violence and innocent lives being lost, so such a discussion isn't timely.

In fact, neither of those arguments holds up under scrutiny and are mostly designed to avoid consideration of workable solutions. The United States doesn't have a corner on mental illness, but it seems to have a corner on gun violence and mass killings.

I think some scrutiny is warranted, and it's not just timely, it's long over-due. There are things that can be sensibly done to reduce some of the gun violence, even knowing that doing all of them won't completely eliminate gun violence. We should not let perfection be the unwitting enemy of the good.

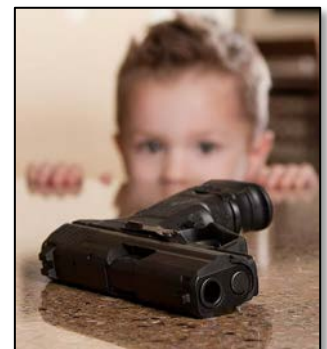
Reasonable people should be able to agree on these measures being implemented:

- **No fly, no buy.** That is to say, anyone who cannot pass muster enough to board a commercial airplane should not be allowed to buy a gun.
- **Background checks.** There should be no loopholes in required background checks, at gun shows or on-line -- wherever. Anyone who wants to buy a gun should have a satisfactory background check completed, however long that takes.
- **Domestic violent people.** Anyone who has committed domestic violence, used a weapon to commit a crime of any kind, or has had a restraining order or no-contact order entered against them by a judge, should not be allowed to buy or own a gun.
- **Weapon capacities.** Just as surely as bazookas are outlawed, automatic weapons should be banned (those where the shooter who merely pulls the trigger once and holds it can shoot until the magazine is empty).
- **Bump Stocks.** Similarly, "bump stocks" that effectively convert a semi-automatic weapon to automatic operational capabilities, should be outlawed except for military use, and those already in the public domain should be taken (with just compensation).



- **Clip Capacity.** Ammunition clips should be limited to maybe six shells – that should be enough to dissuade a home intruder or kill a deer. Intruders and deer deserve a running chance by requiring a re-load after six rapid-fire shots.
- **Ghost Guns.** Sale of parts that buyers can assemble to create a gun without serial numbers should be illegal.
- **Age Restriction.** No one under the age of 21 should be allowed to buy or be in possession of a gun of any kind without adult supervision; okay, strike that, a BB gun would be okay, but nothing more lethal than that.
- **Mental Health Commitment.** Anyone who has been involuntarily committed for mental health treatment should not be allowed to buy or own a gun.
- **Treatment Insurance.** Mandatory mental health coverage under Medicare and Medicaid should be re-instated.
- **Red Flag Enforcement.** Pursuant to Red Flag legislation, local law enforcement should be able to blacklist anyone reasonably suspected of being mentally or emotionally unfit, subject to appellate rights to a judge.
- **Concealed Carry.** There should be no unlicensed concealed carrying of a gun allowed except for law enforcement. Bodyguard contractors/employees should also be an exception if they are first trained and certified as such.
- **Intoxicated Buyers.** Sales to an intoxicated person should be prohibited just as surely as selling alcohol to an intoxicated person is currently, and gun sellers should be required to carry liability insurance like dram shop insurance currently required of bartenders.
- **Intoxicated Possession.** Possession of a loaded gun by someone impaired by alcohol or drugs should be a criminal offense.
- **Parental Accountability.**

Personally, I'd be willing to go somewhat further, like holding parents and custodians liable for actions of minor children in their care who are able to access a gun at home and use it or threaten to do so. That wouldn't prevent such access, but it would get folks' attention because of the market and premium cost it would create for an insurance policy to cover the liability exposure. Insurers, in turn, would be able to impose access restrictions as a condition of coverage.



[continued on page 5]

Those should be seen as sensible things that could be done, nation-wide. Even collectively, those things would not stop all gun violence, but each of them would stop the use of a gun to commit indiscriminate or targeted gun violence in some situations where it currently is too convenient. Collectively, they would reduce the occurrence and/or magnitude of gun violence.

We are not without options if there were to be a genuine search for a collection of steps that could help. The steps I've outlined would help, without compromising the intent of the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Randy Evans called for political "leaders" to lead on this subject (*Bloomfield Democrat* May 18, 2022). The foregoing litany of steps that can be taken, or any of them, would be a good place to start and a step in the right direction. With that leadership, we would not have to be helplessly victimized as we are right now.

We are in our perpetual political season. Those who attend candidate "town hall" meetings should insistently ask candidates about these specific recommendations and maybe others, and insist on knowing whether or not the candidate would support each of them and, if not, why.

LGBTQ Iowa Grief Group On Facebook



Know of someone from the LGBTQ community who has lost a spouse or partner? There's a grief group aimed at this specific community in Iowa. Known as the **LGBTQ Iowa Grief Group**, it is a private page on Facebook where people can be themselves and be surrounded by those who have walked the lonely path of the death of a loved one. This is a peer-led group.

For more information,
contact **Jim Flansburg** at
jamesflansburg@rocketmail.com.



To join the group, go to:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/723143878805662>.

First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarships

2021-2022 Scholarship Committee

Tim Schreck
(Chair)

C.D. Adamson
David Cotton
Ryan Crane
Ken Hanson
Rick Miller
Phil Williams

At the FFBC meeting on June 3, 2022, people gathered to celebrate this year's group of Iowa high school seniors who have distinguished themselves with efforts to reduce homophobia and educate about LGBTQ+ issues in their schools and communities.



Each scholar will receive a scholarship of **\$3,000**, in two installments, to be used for **any** expenses incurred during their post-high school educational endeavors. It matters not whether that endeavor is in college somewhere or a technical school. The scholarships are awarded to deserving students, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, transgender status, or other personal characteristic. Thus far, more than **\$475,000** has been raised, thanks to the generosity of FFBC members and LGBTQ+ allies. **One hundred percent of the money raised goes to the scholarships**; contributions are not used to raise the money, a somewhat unique thing that can be said about the FFBC scholarship program and fundraising. The more money raised, the more money given.

This year we honored: **Jackson Bloodsworth, Elizabeth Boese, G Ellerbroek, Hannah King, Iris Mackenzie, Taylor Mayhue, Abby McLeod, Matthew Monsivais, Ellis Montgomery, Molly Moorhead, Alaynah Rieck, and Estella J. Ruhrer-Johnson**. As you can see from their brief backgrounds on the following pages, their collective efforts have reached all across the state of Iowa.

2022 First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Winners

Jackson Bloodsworth

Davenport Central High School



Jackson is a graduate of Davenport Central High School, with plans to attend Western Illinois University for a degree in marketing. Jackson realized he was gay in third grade, and by seventh grade, was faced with a very grown-up decision put upon him by his church. With family support, Jackson left that church and has been an openly gay person ever since. He was a leader of the Mentors in Violence Prevention program at his school, and he knows he has made a difference mentoring younger students about the harmful impacts of bullying, slurs, and homophobia. Jackson also has started on a track in politics, working as a youth organizer for the Pete Buttigieg campaign in 2019-2020. With intentions to stay involved in political activity, we won't be surprised to hear Jackson's name again in the near future. Jackson is the recipient of the scholarship sponsored by the estate of Cliff Paulsen. Thank you for your efforts Jackson! Congrats!

Elizabeth Boese

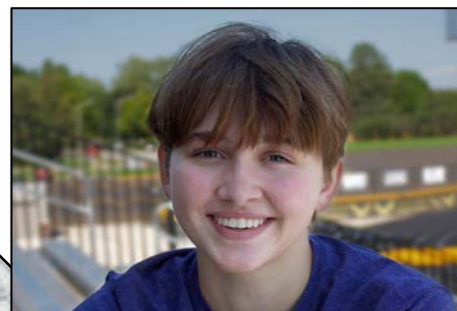
Treynor High School



Elizabeth and her guests were unable to join us this morning due to unavoidable travel to Texas. Elizabeth graduated from Treynor High School and has an impressive future path of veterinary school or becoming a surgeon! Elizabeth impressed us with her involvement in creating the first GSA group at Treynor High School. She has served as vice president the past two years, since she was already pretty busy as student body president. The GSA group has faced strong opposition, including creation of an opposing "super-straight" club, with teacher sponsors! But she and GSA leaders persevered, to the point that today Elizabeth reports a huge reduction of homophobic and hateful language in her school halls. She says that one of the great accomplishments of the GSA group was showing people in the school that they already know and respect LGBTQ people as classmates. And we think that is super-cool! Congratulations Elizabeth!

G Ellerbroek

Waverly-Shell Rock High School



Early this week, G notified me that he and his parents all contracted Covid. So they were unable to join us in person, but are listening in on Zoom. G is a graduate of Waverly-Shell Rock High School, with plans to attend the University of Iowa and eventually become a medical doctor focused on LGBTQ health issues. As a member of the Iowa Youth Congress, G developed a proposal for LGBTQ sex education to be included in Iowa school programs and has presented the proposal to many of Iowa's political leaders. As a transgender young man, G also has directly felt the impact of those leaders' decisions, being denied the opportunity to play on his school's boys tennis team. At his awards day presentation, Gretchen Ellerbroek's name was called several times, but G Ellerbroek is the young man who accepted those awards. Simple honest courage. G is the recipient of the Aureon sponsored scholarship. Congratulations, G!

2022 First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Winners

Hannah King

Moulton-Udell High School



Hannah is a graduate of Moulton-Udell high school and will attend Iowa State University with plans for a degree in education or psychology. Moulton is a town of 600 in southern Iowa, with a high school graduating class of 11 students. Hannah experienced the fear of coming out, especially with no role models to look to anywhere in her school. After letting a few friends know her true self as a sophomore, she never looked back! Hannah was elected student council president and homecoming queen, all as a proud queer young person. Hannah is a respected member of her community for being a leader, an athlete, and an excellent student. Hannah expressed hope that by just being herself, change might happen. Hannah related that she saw an eighth grade student in the halls of her school wearing a Pride t-shirt. Hannah is receiving the 2022 G David Hurd and Trudy Hollman Hurd sponsored scholarship. Congratulations, Hannah!

Iris Mackenzie

Grinnell High School



Iris is one of two graduates that we celebrate this morning from Grinnell High School. Unfortunately, Iris was unable to join us today because she is continuing her education overseas, with a long-range goal of becoming a veterinarian. Our committee selected Iris based on her involvement in the Mentors for Violence Prevention program at Grinnell High school. Iris focused on LGBTQ issues and mentoring younger students about eliminating homophobic actions and slurs. She reported that people can feel a difference at the high school thanks to the MVP program. Iris also shared that she was very motivated by her younger trans brother, also a student at Grinnell, and working to shield him from the challenges so many trans kids face. Let's congratulate Iris for translating her personal love for her brother to a broader community effort of reducing homophobia.

Taylor Mayhue

North Scott High School



Taylor is a graduate of North Scott High School with plans to attend Iowa State University for a master's degree in food science, with a focus on food security. These plans relate very well to what impressed us most about Taylor -- she was the leader of her school's Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter. FFA is not a traditionally liberal-minded organization. As a member of the LGBTQ community, Taylor brought awareness of biased practices that needed attention and revision, such as allowing separate hotel rooms for LGBTQ students, inattentive pronoun usage, and lack of a welcoming space for all students. While Taylor identifies as bisexual, she exhibits a strong advocacy for trans members of her community, and she sees a future in politics to address the rights of all marginalized communities. Thanks for your advocacy and leadership Taylor!

2022 First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Winners

**Abby
McLeod**

Nevada High School



Abby graduated from Nevada High School with plans to earn a psychology degree from the University of Iowa. As the leader of the GSA at Nevada High School for two years, Abby focused on communication through meeting topics, posters, and creation of “awareness days.” Whether at home with family, or leading a meeting of school peers, Abby focuses on direct communication to bring people together. One unique experience our committee found really interesting was Abby’s summer job as the diversity auditor at her local public library. She was tasked with canvassing the young adult book section to determine gaps in LGBTQ literature, and other cultural reference points and authors. The result were additions made to the library selection and increased access to information for more members of the community. Well done Abby. We wish you all the best!

**Matthew
Monsivais**

Ankeny Centennial High School



Matthew is a graduate of Ankeny Centennial High School and plans to attend the University of Iowa to become, as Matthew puts it, “a feisty immigration lawyer.” Very early in life, Matthew recognized that gay slurs and homophobia are often directed at people just for “seeming gay,” even before they really have a way of understanding their own orientation. To counter this, Matthew approaches life with the mindset that being proudly, openly gay in any space is critical. He put this mindset into action by joining the Mayor’s Youth Council in Ankeny, and then the Iowa Youth Congress. This was followed by co-founding the Advocates for Diversity, Inclusion and Awareness organization in Ankeny, a group focused on school curriculum and public promotion of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Matthew is the recipient of the 2022 Polk County Board of Supervisors scholarship. Stay feisty Matthew, and congratulations!

**Ellis
Montgomery**

Grinnell High School



Ellis graduated from Grinnell High School. Our selection committee was impressed with the courage Ellis has shown since junior high school, first coming out as a gay female, and much more recently as a nonbinary transgender male. Being true to yourself can lead to a lot of questions from others. Ellis focuses on education and conversation to help others learn and to bring awareness of the realities that many young transgender persons face every day. Ellis will be continuing his work on an Associate’s Degree from the Iowa Culinary Institute at DMACC. And Ellis is already very involved with culinary arts, competing in various statewide competitions and enlisted with the Iowa National Guard as a Culinary Food Specialist. Training starts soon! We wish you great success Ellis!

2022 First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Winners

**Molly
Moorhead**

Perry High School



Molly is a graduate of Perry High School with plans to attend UNI for a degree in middle school education. The teacher in Molly has already been hard at work as president of her school's Gender and Sexuality Alliance group, and as a member of the school's Mentors in Violence Prevention program, where she mentored freshmen. In her application, Molly shared stories of direct confrontation with bullies at Perry High School, and of affirming LGBTQ members in her school community through MVP interactions. Molly's goal is to be a teacher, not just to teach "nouns and verbs," but to include messages of diversity, inclusion, and acceptance in every classroom which welcomes her. Sounds like my kind of school! Molly is the recipient of the 2022 scholarship sponsored by David Cotton. Congratulations Molly!

**Alaynah
Rieck**

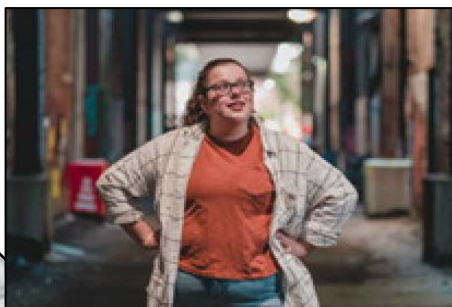
Center Point-Urbana High School



Alaynah attended Center Point-Urbana high school and will be attending college at UNI with plans to major in criminology, with a minor in psychology. Alaynah shared an experience of working with a group of teachers and students to create the first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion group at her school. And while she had already spent years in school as the target of slurs, bullying, and ignorance, a student survey made clear to teachers and adults involved in the DEI group the full extent of homophobia and prejudice. While resistance to LGBTQ education continues at the highest levels, the DEI committee has become the most popular student-led group at CPU. Sometimes leaders never get to see the fruits of their labors, but we feel very certain that Alaynah has been at the front of a wave of change at Center Point-Urbana, and we see her bringing change to the world for years to come. Congratulations, Alaynah!

**Estella J.
Ruhrrer-Johnson**

Mt. Vernon High School



Estella, or Ella, attended and graduated from Sioux City East High School. Rest assured, Estella did not waste one minute of her time there! Here are just a few of her accomplishments: member of the Mayor's Youth Commission, originator of the local March for our Lives chapter, active participant in the Stomp Out Stigma organization focused on mental health, leader of the school GSA organization, and president of the Iowa Safe Schools Leadership Council. Estella understands that any and all marginalized communities need a leader, so why not her?! And she is a very strong advocate for the environment! Estella plans to study political science and social justice at the University of Iowa and is the recipient of the Jane Ann Cotton scholarship. Please congratulate Estella Ruhrrer-Johnson!

Scholarship Breakfast

Photo Gallery



2022 Scholarship Winners: (Back Row) Abby McLeod, Matthew Monsivais, Jackson Bloodsworth, Ellis Montgomery, Hannah King; (Front Row) Estella Ruhrer-Johnson, Taylor Mayhue, Alaynah Rieck, Molly Moorhead; not pictured: Elizabeth Boese, G Ellerbroek, Iris Mackenzie



Photos by Gary Moore
& Wade Petersen

Scholarship Breakfast Photo Gallery



Photos by
Gary Moore
&
Wade
Petersen

First Friday Breakfast Club Pride Fest 2022 Booth



2021
Scholar
Emmaline
Mitchell
Stopped by
the Booth



Iowa Safe Schools

by Gary Moore

What a beautiful June morning, a first Friday morning to enjoy a large crowd of special guests at Hoyt Sherman Place. It was our annual First Friday Breakfast Club Scholarship Award Breakfast where we recognize and awarded \$3000 scholarships to 12 deserving high school seniors from around the state of Iowa. I was lucky enough to sit next to Jane Ann Cotton, one of our scholarship underwriters donating \$3000 or more and the mother of Board Member David Cotton. The room was filled with our members and allies and our remarkable scholars and their families, all of which have distinguished themselves with significant efforts to counter homophobia, promote LGBTQ+ acceptance, and educate their schools and communities on LGBTQ+ issues. It is enough to bring tears to this old gay man.

After FFBC President Byron Huff welcomed our distinguished guests, **Mark Turnage** from **Iowa Safe Schools** was introduced as our guest speaker. Mark shared his story of always feeling like an outcast. He tended to isolate himself with what I presumed was a negative self-image, a result of his young person's unathletic body and his gay identity. Mark graduated from the University of Northern Iowa with an emphasis in Film Studies and Creative Writing. His degree did not prove to be fruitful in creating employment that was fulfilling. Both of his parents were supportive teachers. Yet his life seemed unfulfilling. Then his parents encouraged him to apply for a job with Iowa Safe Schools which was housed in the same building as the Iowa State Education Association, of which his parents were a part.

It appears Mark has found a home. Mark has now been the Registrar and Office Manager for Iowa Safe Schools since 2014. He coordinates transcripts, billing, and technical support for participants of Safe Schools Academy online classes, registration for the annual Iowa Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth, and secretarial support for the organization. Friends of First Friday Breakfast Club are familiar with his skill in writing as well as his love of films. Mark's regular film review in the FFBC Newsletter every month is always informative, fun reading, and well respected.



That is where Iowa Safe Schools comes in. They provide comprehensive support, victim services, resources, and events for LGBTQ and allied youth. Serving 4,500 annually, Iowa Safe Schools is the largest LGBTQ+ youth-serving organization in the Midwest. Mark went on to explain more about the many programs Iowa Safe Schools provides that assist youth, parents, and educators. Their staff has grown since Mark joined Safe Schools in 2014 as have their programs and their reach.



June Speaker Mark Turnage



Mark explained that Iowa Safe Schools offers direct services and support to students who have been bullied anywhere in the state of Iowa. All students need a safe, supportive atmosphere in which they can learn, including students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning. (LGBTQ). Unfortunately, bullying, harassment, and discrimination against LGBTQ students occur often in our schools. In fact, 82% of transgender youth report they feel unsafe at schools. Seventy-four percent of LGBTQ students were verbally bullied in the past year because of their sexual orientation. As these students face verbal and physical harassment, education, policymakers, parents, and other students are often hampered by the lack of quality information and resources to protect LGBTQ students.



Invest DSM

by Supervisor Matt McCoy, Polk County, 5th District



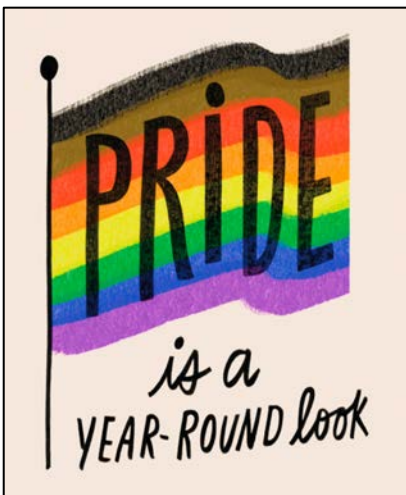
Polk County and the City of Des Moines created an organization which have come together for a common goal—investing in our urban core and neighborhoods in Des Moines where residents live, work, play, and shop. **Invest DSM** is making long-term, sustainable, and strategic investments to reverse the decline in these neighborhoods with the goal of improving these neighborhoods and attracting new residents. Each year, Polk County is committed to investing up to \$5 million to match the City of Des Moines' \$5 million. The areas slated for redevelopment are Columbus Park, Drake Neighborhood, Oak Park, and Highland Park.

In these investment districts, residents can qualify for homeowner renovation programs which help homeowners make all kinds of improvements like maintenance and repairs to floor plan reconfigurations with a forgiveness period of either five or seven years to encourage homeowners to stay in the neighborhood. This, in turn, will increase the property value which increases the tax base for the city and county. In 2021, homeowner renovation projects consisted of 68 fully completed and another 115 under construction. These 68 projects represent more than \$1.8 million in investments in Des Moines' older housing stock. For every Invest DSM dollar, homeowners came in with a \$2.11 match. In addition to home renovations, Invest DSM is promoting single family development programs which incentivizes builders to build new homes that are consistent with the neighborhood housing stock design. The organization is also infilling property and sometimes demolishing dilapidated homes.

Currently, the city and county are also investing in **Block Challenge Grants** where up to ten participants can make investments in their neighborhood exteriors (basically anything you see from the street) to improve the look and feel of neighborhoods. These tend to be smaller projects, but they're impactful as they improve the look of the neighborhood from the street level by providing needed paint, new steps, and sidewalks up to the house.

In addition to the residential programs, there is also a **commercial grant program** that is investing in commercial properties that need interior/exterior work. A good example of the commercial program is the Highland Park area that includes Chucks Pizza, Highland Bakery, and Slow Down Coffee.

We are committed to this program for the next five years with hopes that we will be able to expand our territory. The county has just committed another million dollars for a similar program to be established in West Des Moines with improvements in the Valley Junction area to improve the quality of housing stock. To learn more about Invest DSM's programs and success stories, visit their website at www.investdsm.org.



“Please remember, especially in these times of group-think and the right-on chorus, that no person is your friend (or kin) who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow and be perceived as fully blossomed as you were intended.”

■ **Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple***

The Northman

A Movie Review by Mark Turnage

An auteur like director Robert Eggers provides a uniquely-patterned perspective in their body of works that becomes their thematic signature. Much like a Hitchcock film provides an expectation of a twisty thriller featuring psychologically complex characters in a modern setting, Eggers is known for dark psychological period pieces such as *The Witch* and *The Lighthouse* that deconstruct themes such as family, work, and masculinity using psychological horror as a medium, wherein the main character's sanity unravels when confronted with twisted embodiments of the values important to them. *The Northman*, a Viking revenge epic, is both an echo of and a departure from Egger's traditional formula that adopts more brutality and visual spectacle in addition to thrilling action sequences, yet its narrative would benefit from more of Egger's creative muscle.

Based on the Viking legend of Prince Amleth (Alexander Skarsgard), the direct inspiration for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *The Northman* opens with a young Amleth witnessing his father King Aurvandill (Ethan Hawke) murdered by his uncle Fjölur (Claes Bang), who kidnaps his mother Queen Gudrún (Nicole Kidman) after sacking Amleth's village. Vowing vengeance as he escapes, Amleth spends years as a nomadic berserker, raiding and pillaging indiscriminately but having little semblance of personality beyond being a fearsome fighter. When he encounters a Seeress (Björk, lol) who informs him that his chance for revenge is coming soon, he's initially doubtful, until he sees prophetic signs of his father's and rumors of his uncle's location. Posing as a slave, he meets a prisoner named Olga (Anna Taylor-Joy), a slave who claims to be a sorceress, and together they infiltrate Fjölur's farm in a plot to kill him and rescue Queen Gudrún.

Eggers is smart to include scenes of Viking mysticism to bulk up the traditional *Hamlet* narrative, underscoring the ferocious, transient, and animalistic nature of the world Amleth occupies. Early in the film, young Amleth participates in a hallucinogenic coming-of-age ritual where he and his father howl like wolves on all fours; his father's court jester (Willem Dafoe, in arguably the best role of the film) questions whether Amleth is man or animal. Years later, a grown Amleth runs wild with a "pack" of similar men who echo that same ritual to work up their bloodlust--the action sequences that depict how fluidly he tears through enemy soldiers are both transfixing and shocking. Yet the opponents he encounters are more forces of nature than defined personalities. In the world of *The Northman*, every human is really a ferocious animal at heart, with exception of a paranormal entity here and there.

It's a relevant theme today, where combat is mostly carried out over barbs and tweets instead of blades and bare hands. But in film and in literature, personality and character are thoroughly embedded in all the above, and unfortunately, it's what *The Northman* lacks. Don't get me wrong--there's plenty of ripped, shirtless Vikings to go around (Thor Björnsson, anyone?), badass fight sequences, and eye-popping imagery--but somehow the deeper meaning beyond "finding Valhalla" is missing. It's the *worthiness* of Valhalla that needs to be explored through found humanity. Compare and contrast with *The Green Knight*, a historical legend also given the cinematic treatment. Both are period pieces emphasizing the legendary and monolithic aspect of their worlds, but the characters of *The Green Knight* are textured with their flaws, desires, hopes, and failures, and its world is richer for it.

If you want a thrilling, trippy drama with strong Conan the Barbarian vibes, definitely give *The Northman* a watch—but if you're expecting the depth of Eggers' earlier works, look elsewhere.



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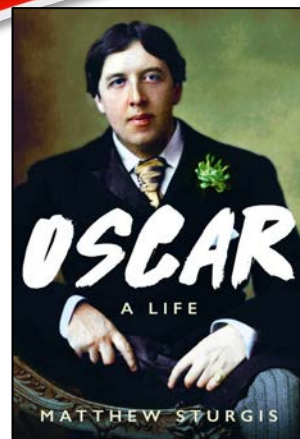
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Oscar: A Life

by Matthew Sturgis

A Book
Review by
Steve Person



Matthew Sturgis published his prodigious paperback biography in 2019 in the United Kingdom. The book's impressive pages number 890. The final 170 pages consist of notes and sources he used in producing this undeniably comprehensive tome. As a reader, I tackled the 720 pages of text with pencil in hand to help me remember those points I might refer to in producing this book review.

In the late 1980s, I purchased Richard Ellmann's extensive biography entitled *Oscar Wilde*. Since then I considered his work to be the definitive biography of Wilde. As it turns out, Sturgis felt differently. As he points out in the Preface of his book, "In the thirty years since Ellmann's book appeared, much new material has come to light, much interesting research has been carried out, and the deficiencies in Ellmann's biography have become ever more apparent."

Oscar Wilde began life in Ireland, the second son of William and Jane Wilde. William, an oculist, provided well for his family while Jane took on a more romantic and literary role in mid-nineteenth Ireland. Oscar and his older brother, William, were home schooled early on, but in 1864, he and his brother enrolled in the Portora Royal School. From there, Oscar entered Trinity College, Dublin. Upon his graduation, he traveled to Oxford and chose Magdalen College as his preferred training ground for an enhanced education. The literary atmosphere of Oxford provided a perfect outlet for Oscar's interest in classical learning. It also contributed to his intense interest in travel from France to Greece to Italy and later to America.

Once ensconced in London, Oscar began making his mark as a raconteur and espouser of the Aesthetic Movement. As he frequently claimed, the aim of life is pleasure. He gained a reputation as a lecturer and became known not only for his views but also for his outward appearance. Always in need of money, Wilde sailed to America in 1882, spending months traveling the length and breadth of the United States. His lecture tour included numerous stops in Iowa. In Ellmann's book, he stated, "A young painter Wilde met in Des Moines, named Spencer Blake, was abruptly invited...and as abruptly agreed to accompany him as private secretary, following which they would go to Australia, back to London. And then back to America in the autumn of 1883. This plan fell through." Sturgis made no mention of this plan in his book.

In 1884, Wilde married Constance Lloyd, a woman of some means, and their union resulted in the birth of two sons, Vyvyan and Cyril. Wilde, however, could never seem to manage his financial affairs. If money came his way, it was spent in no time, and he frequently pressed his friends for loans.

Wilde met Lord Alfred Douglas around 1891 when the young Douglas was a student at Oxford. The two became lovers much to the chagrin to Douglas's father, the Ninth Marquess of Queensberry. The stormy relationship between Wilde and Lord Alfred suffered numerous breakups and reunions. Wilde's eventual success as a playwright of such West End hits as *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, to name just a few of his successful writings, never were able to provide enough money to keep his creditors at bay.

Finally, in a scenario too complicated to explain here, Lord Douglas and Wilde sued the Marquess of Queensberry for libel. Queensberry, in a brilliant maneuver, turned the tables on the two, and Wilde ended up in prison for two years for practicing homosexuality that became outlawed in England in the mid nineteenth century (and, incidentally not wiped off the books until 1967).

Having lost his reputation, his society friends, and his will to do much writing upon his release, he did, however, produce one piece, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, that sold spectacularly well in England even if his reputation didn't fare nearly as well.

Wilde's life came to a sad end November 30, 1900, in Paris. It didn't take too long after his death for his works and his reputation to regain their proper place in British literary history.